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Mouw, THE GOD WHO COMMANDS

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give these lectures illustrates. Contemporary interest in virtue ethics suggests that as he and others in the tradition he evokes (whichever it is) present a substantive ethical theory that shows itself adequate to the times and a true competitor of Kantianism, utilitarianism, contractarianism, and human rights theory, it will have an audience.

If MacIntyre wants to be heard more, he must produce the substantive theory that will engage his opponents. Simply to claim that Saint Thomas has the solution to the ethical and philosophical problems of our times is a move that has been tried in Catholic schools for over a hundred years, with less than compelling success. The medieval Church's position on the immorality of usury might lead one to question authoritative Church pronouncements on some moral issues, and many Catholics have come to question the position of today's Catholic magisterium on the immorality of contraception, especially when the position is defended by natural law arguments rather than by authority. MacIntyre does not deal with these or other substantive issues. He relishes uncovering and emphasizing contemporary dilemmas, while he underplays the consensus on everyday morality that holds that wanton killing, lying, and stealing are wrong, or that persons deserve respect, and he also underplays the growing transcultural agreements on the value of human freedom and the importance of human rights.

With *After Virtue*, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, and the present work we know clearly what MacIntyre attacks. We also know his views on the incommensurability of philosophical positions, and his pessimism about the state of society, morality, and the university. This volume argues for a method. The proof of whether it is in fact superior to alternative and opposing methods will be whether it can yield a moral theory adequate to the times. This series of lectures claims that it can; but the lectures contain only a promise.

The God Who Commands, by **Richard J. Mouw**. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame press, 1990. Pp. vii and 214. \$24.95 cloth.

Reviewed by JANINE MARIE IDZIAK, Loras College.

Mouw has undertaken an examination of the much discussed divine command ethical theory from a specifically Calvinist perspective. The book is *Calvinist* not in the sense of being a strict historical study of particular divine command moralists from that tradition, but in the sense of trying to capture the overall spirit of Calvinist theology. Much of the book draws upon previously published essays by Mouw. Thus the range of issues is wide, and the discussion sometimes digresses from an ethics of divine commands *per se* to such topics as Alasdair MacIntyre's exposition of the Reformation view of the "self," Christian hedonism, and even medical ethics.

Readers coming to Mouw's book from the Analytic tradition and familiar with logically rigorous treatments of the divine command theory will find Mouw's argumentation loose and his writing style almost conversational in character. Nevertheless, there is much in Mouw's book that is suggestive of new issues to explore about an ethics of divine commands and which thus breaks new ground in terms of the literature on this ethical theory.

Historically, it has been a matter of dispute which faculty in God (*viz.*, will alone or intellect and will conjointly) is responsible for issuing divine commands. Mouw moves the discussion in a different direction by raising a comparable question in the context of *trinitarian* theology: "When you think about *obeying* God which member of the Trinity do you view yourself as relating to primarily? Which of the divine Persons calls you to, or directly mediates, the strategies for your response of, obedience to the divine will?" [p. 151]. Mouw finds that different Christian groups have focused on different persons of the Trinity: Calvinism and magisterial Catholicism have been strongly oriented toward God the Father, the Mennonites and Catholic Franciscan piety have centered on Jesus, and Pentecostal Christians emphasize the Spirit [pp. 151-52, 170-75]. Presumably, which person of the Trinity is chosen as the divine commander will color one's divine command theory, and it would be a worthwhile exercise for other philosophers to work out the different types of divine command theory which might be aligned with the different persons of the Trinity. Mouw makes some progress in this regard in pointing out that a first person emphasis has often been connected with hierarchicalist patterns of thought, a feature which in turn introduces the feminist critique of patriarchy into a discussion of divine command ethics [p. 161]. Mouw goes on to raise the question of what a theological feminism would look like with reference to an understanding of ethical obedience to the divine will [p. 164]. Again, concern with a distinctively feminist perspective is an issue new to the divine command literature.

Mouw likewise suggests that an ethics of divine commands can and should be related to an ethics of virtue and to the concept of the role of narrative in theology [chap. 7]. One major topic in the current literature on the divine command theory has been the delineation of different *forms* which an ethics of divine commands may assume, and Mouw makes a contribution to this discussion in raising the issue whether divine commands are addressed to *individuals* or to *communities* [p. 43].

Another significant issue in the current discussion of divine command ethics is what positive reasons can be brought forward for espousing this ethical theory. Admittedly working out of a *sola scriptura* Protestant tradition [p. 8], Mouw believes that an ethics of divine commands is *bibli-cally* based [pp. 6-10]. This point is not new. However, Mouw makes mention of another sort of grounding for an ethics of divine commands,

namely, *Christian spirituality*. He cites Thomas a Kempis, Catherine of Siena, John of Damascus, John Knox, Catherine Booth, and the Jesuit Jean-Pierre de Caussade as among those spiritual leaders, writers, and directors [pp. 1-2, 6] who have maintained that "human beings are at their best when they are surrendering to the will of God in all things" [p. 6]. Although Mouw devotes only a few paragraphs to this idea, his comments are genuinely insightful and open up a whole new line of defense for an ethics of divine commands.

Mouw provides only two short quotations from Thomas a Kempis and Jean-Pierre de Caussade as illustrative of a Christian's sense of complete abandonment to the will of God [pp. 1-2, 6]. In fact, there is an embarrassment of riches on this subject within the realm of Christian spirituality. For example, in a meditation on the phrase of the Lord's Prayer, "your will be done on earth as it is in heaven," Teresa of Avila muses:

"Fiat voluntas tua": that is, may the Lord fulfill His will in me, in every way and manner which Thou, my Lord, desirest. If Thou wilt do this by means of trials, give me strength and let them come. If by means of persecutions and sickness and dishonour and need, here I am, my Father, I will not turn my face away from Thee nor have I the right to turn my back upon them. ...Do Thou grant me the grace of bestowing on me Thy Kingdom so that I may do Thy will, since He has asked this of me. Dispose of me as of that which is Thine own, in accordance with Thy Will.¹

St. Anselm of Canterbury prayed to God to "dispose of me, my thoughts and actions, according to your good pleasure, so that your will may always be done by me and in me and concerning me."² Nor is it the case that a sense of conformity to God's will characterizes only extraordinary Christians. The same notion is found in traditional hymns:

Father, who didst fashion man
 Godlike in thy loving plan,
 Fill us with that love divine,
 And conform our wills to thine.³
 Watch o'er thy Church, O Lord, in mercy,
 Save it from evil, guard it still;
 Perfect it in thy love, unite it,
 Cleansed and conformed unto thy will.⁴

Or again, perusal of a worship book such as the Presbyterian *Daily Prayer* provides examples of how the notion of conformity to God's will figures into Christian prayer: "Eternal God, send your Holy Spirit into our hearts, to direct and rule us according to your will..."⁵; "God of love, as you have given your life to us, so may we live according to your holy will revealed in Jesus Christ..."⁶; "Purify our desires that we may seek your will..."⁷; "...give us

patience to be diligent and to labor according to your will..."⁸ Many more examples could surely be given. In sum, *one can defend an ethics of divine commands as a formalization of an important theme of the Christian spiritual life, namely, conformity to the divine will.*

There are a variety of ways of involving God's commands in the moral enterprise, and in the contemporary literature the term "ethics of divine commands" has come to encompass a whole family of theories. Thus Mouw raises the question whether God's commanding something is to be viewed as a right-making or a right-indicating characteristic [pp. 28-30].

Mouw presents several arguments in favor of the view that divine commands are merely indicative, and not constitutive, of what is right. For one thing, some divine command moralists have paid attention to the *attributes* of the God who does the commanding, viz., that God is just, or aims at human flourishing. One possible interpretation of this phenomenon is that a morally right action is one that promotes justice or human flourishing, and concomitantly, that since we believe that God is just or aims at human flourishing, we take God's commands as spelling out what is right [p. 29]. But Mouw finally comes down on the side of wanting to include a right-making dimension in divine commands: "But in the final analysis it does not seem quite right to treat the connection between God's willing something and that something's being morally right in *too* loose a manner...it does seem appropriate to think that in some mysterious sense the right indicating and the right making begin to merge as soon as we pause to reflect upon divine goodness" [p. 30]. Mouw's final position comes across as weak. And it is not argued for, but merely asserted.

There are, we believe, good reasons for seeing divine commands as *right-making*. For example, in support of an ethics of divine commands appeal has been made to biblical cases such as that of Abraham sacrificing his son Isaac, the Israelites stealing from the Egyptians on their way out of Egypt, the prophet Hosea taking a "wife of fornication," the patriarchs practicing polygamy, and Samson killing himself. All of these cases involve actions which would normally be considered *morally wrong* but which, in the particular instance, *become the right thing to do because of a divine command*. Or again, there is a sense in which taking divine commands as merely "right-indicating" makes God inessential and peripheral to the moral enterprise. For if God's function is simply to let us know what is the right thing to do (according to some standard which obtains independently of God), then someone else, equally informed, could replace God. Yet one of the insights supposedly captured in a divine command ethical theory is the *absolute centrality* of God in the life of the believer.

Mouw's book is also noteworthy in providing an extended response to a criticism of the divine command theory made early in the contemporary

literature, namely, the objection of Patrick Nowell-Smith that obedience to divine commands represents an *infantile* form of morality. Thus Mouw has a chapter entitled "Commands for Grown-Ups."

Overall, Mouw's *The God Who Commands* should provide continued impetus for discussion of an ethics of divine commands.

NOTES

1. St. Teresa of Avila, *The Way of Perfection*, translated by E. Allison Peers (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Image, 1964), p. 215.

2. *The Prayers and Meditations of St. Anselm*, translated by Sr. Benedicta Ward (New York: Penguin Books, 1979), p. 91.

3. Hymn "Father, we thank thee who hast planted."

4. Hymn "On this day, the first of days."

5. *DAILY PRAYER, The Worship of God*, Supplemental Liturgical Resource 5, Prepared by the Office of Worship for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the Cumberland Presbyterian Church (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987), p. 192.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 134.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 222.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 224.

The Recovery of Virtue: The Relevance of Aquinas for Christian Ethics, by **Jean Porter**. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990. Pp. 208. \$24.95 cloth.

Reviewed by RUSSELL HITTINGER, Catholic University

The author sets out to interpret Aquinas' theory of morality as it is found in the *Summa Theologiae*—a work, she notes, which represents his "mature theological synthesis." Porter emphasizes from the outset that a chief value of Aquinas' theory is its unity, and its way of holding together a wide array of different concepts, as well as its power to suggest interconnections among the various themes and problems with which Christian ethicists still must deal. Achieving a synoptic view of Aquinas' theory of morality is no easy matter, for the *secunda pars* of the *Summa* is enormous, consisting of over three hundred questions, which comprise over fifteen hundred articles. This presents problems not only in the order of magnitude, but also interpretive problems concerning how to weigh and interrelate the quite different ways Aquinas treats such subjects as the virtues and the relation between human action and the final end. The interpreter is challenged to find a strategy for how to go about giving a balanced exposition of Aquinas. Porter tackles the